

INTRODUCTION

Except in an occasional year, North Carolina's birth rate has fallen steadily since about 1954, reaching U.S. levels during the mid-seventies and falling below U.S. levels in 1978. That year marked a full decade of federally-subsidized family planning services and a half decade of legally induced abortion in North Carolina. Those factors, combined with such social factors as postponement of marriage, delayed childbearing, and the changing roles of women, have contributed to the general decline in fertility and, one would hope, to a substantial decline in unwanted fertility.

Since 1978, the fertility of North Carolina white women has fluctuated for an overall decline of only one percent. The rate for nonwhite women, on the other hand, has declined in each year except 1982 for an overall reduction of 14 percent. In contrast to those general trends, however, the rates of older white women have increased while those of older nonwhite women have fluctuated.

This report examines age-race-specific trends in both fertility and legal abortion. The year 1978 is used as the base since, due to increased voluntary reporting of detailed information, the reliability of abortion estimates for population subgroups improved substantially at that time. Presently, providers are reporting detailed information for an estimated 97-99 percent of all abortions performed, and the Alan Guttmacher Institute has consistently found North Carolina to have one of the most complete state reporting systems in the nation.

As a by-product of this study's intended analyses, problems that may be associated with delayed and limited childbearing are also examined and discussed in this report.

DEFINITIONS

ABORTION: The purposeful interruption of pregnancy with the intention other than to produce a liveborn infant or to remove a dead fetus and which does not result in a live birth. Spontaneous abortions are not reportable in North Carolina.

FERTILITY: Relates live births to the female population exposed to the risk of giving birth.

UNMARRIED: Includes women who had never been married or who were widowed or legally divorced at the time of an abortion procedure or more than 280 days prior to a birth.

FORMULAS*

In the formulas given below, abortion counts include only *resident* events *occurring in North Carolina*, and both the numerator and denominator may be race-specific. In Table 5, the abortion fraction is also specific for marital status. Other information concerning numerators, denominators, and sources of error are found in the Appendix.

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| Fertility Rate: | $\frac{\text{Number of resident live births in age group}}{\text{Number of females in age group}} \times 1,000$ |
| Abortion Rate: | $\frac{\text{Number of legal abortions in age group}}{\text{Number of females in age group}} \times 1,000$ |
| Abortion Fraction: | $\frac{\text{Number of legal abortions in age group}}{\text{Number of resident pregnancies (live births plus fetal deaths plus abortions) in age group}} \times 1,000$ |

* The formulas are standard measurements found in various national publications as well as textbooks on epidemiology and biostatistics.

FERTILITY RATES, ABORTION RATES, AND ABORTION FRACTIONS

Between 1978 and 1984, the number of live births to North Carolina residents increased 4.3 percent to 85,986 while the number of in-state resident abortions rose 30.7 percent to 32,772. In total, the state's fertility rate declined about 5%, 1.3% for whites versus 14.1% for nonwhites, while the abortion rate and fraction both rose—the rate by 17% among whites versus 21% among nonwhites and the fraction by 14% among whites versus 28% among nonwhites. Table 1 shows these rates and fractions for each of the years 1978-1984. As a matter for later discussion, the reader will note that, for both races, reductions in abortion rates during 1981-82 correspond to reduced abortion fractions and increased fertility rates in 1982.